‘Tiny but Mighty’ Conversational Elements: Explicating Non-lexical Backchannels in Spoken Turkish*

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ABSTRACT: This paper analyzes the functions of non-lexical backchannels in the Spoken Turkish Corpus and the differences in their use in naturally formed combinatory groups of gender and age (young-middle aged-elderly). Adopting a cyclic approach in the analysis of the 2231 non-lexical backchannels from the study corpus, two main and 16 sub-functions, eight of which are unique to this study and exhibit original dimensions have been identified. Results reveal that groups with female speakers and young speakers tend to use backchannels more for ‘approving the other speaker’, whereas groups with male speakers, middle-aged and elderly speakers tend to use backchannels more for ‘continuation of the conversation’. Despite these statistical tendencies, the findings suggest that when people have more in common and more interest in the given conversational topic, they use multifunctional non-lexical backchannels to construct meaning more cooperatively, regardless of gender and age-related variables.

Keywords: non-lexical backchannels, functions, group differences, Spoken Turkish Corpus

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‘Küçük ama Güçlü’ Konuşma Unsurları: Sözlü Türkçede Sözcüksel Olmayan Geribildirimler

ÖZ: Bu çalışmada sözcüksel olmayan geribildirimlerin Sözlü Türkçe Derlemi verisindeki işlevleri ve veride farklı cinsiyet ve yaş birleşimlerinden doğal olarak oluşan gruplarda geribildirimlerin kullanımındaki farklılıklar incelenmektedir. Veri incelemesinde döngüsel bir yöntem kullanılarak sözcüksel olmayan 2231 geribildirim için iki temel işlev ve sekizi ilk kez bu çalışmada tanımlanan 16 alt işlev belirlenmiştir. Bulgular kadınlar ve genç konuşmacıların daha fazla olduğu gruplarda geribildirimlerin temel işlevlerinin ‘onaylamak’ olduğunu, erkekler ile orta yaşlı ve ileri yaşlı konuşmacıların daha fazla olduğu gruplarda ise geribildirimlerin temel olarak ‘konuyu devam ettirmek’ için kullanıldığını ortaya koymaktadır. Belirtilen istatiksel eğilimlere rağmen araştırma sonuçları konuşmacıların daha fazla ortak yanları bulunduğunda ve konuşulan konuyla daha ilgili olduklarında, cinsiyet ve yaş değişkenlerinden bağımsız olarak, iş birliği içinde anlam inşa etmek için çok işlevli sözcüksel olmayan geri bildirimleri sıklıkla kullandıklarını göstermektedir.

Anahtar sözcükler: sözcüksel olmayan geribildirimler, işlevler, grupsal farklar, Sözlü Türkçe Derlemi

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1 Introduction

Widely regarded as ‘short messages’ such as *aha* and *mhm*, backchannels are usually not noticed unless a person’s backchanneling behavior becomes inconsonant with the expected norm. Though they are considered to be ‘short messages’, backchannels have notable missions in the organization of conversations with their various functions.

Backchannels might be verbal (lexical or non-lexical expressions) or non-verbal (e.g., nods, head movement, laughter,) and sometimes verbal and non-verbal forms may be observed in combination. Gardner (2001) underlines that since non-lexical backchannels lack a conventional dictionary meaning, identifying their functions is especially arduous, hence they have been mostly ignored in research. Moreover, their definitions, forms and functions are still disputable. For these very reasons, a more in-depth analysis in a language other than English based on corpus data might significantly contribute to backchannel research.

Since the coinage of the term ‘backchannel’ by Yngve (1970), these markers have gained much popularity and various terms have been used for attribution. Many researchers preferred to use Yngve’s term ‘backchannels’ (see Cutrone, 2005; Maynard, 1986, 1997; Oreström, 1983; Saft, 2007; Tottie, 1991; White, 1989). Among the other terms used are: ‘minimal responses’ (Fishman, 1983), ‘continuers’ (Schegloff, 1982), ‘reactive tokens’ (Clancy et al., 1996), ‘response

tokens' (Gardner, 2001), 'generic listener responses' (Bavelas, Coates, and Johnson, 2002) and 'acknowledgment tokens' (Jefferson, 1984).

Earlier research largely focused on the functions of backchannels in regard to keeping the conversational flow. A myriad of studies agree that backchannels are used for showing listeners' attention, support and comprehension (see Aare et al., 2014; Benus et al., 2007; Maynard, 1997; Ruede et al., 2017). In addition, Duncan and Niederehe (1974) propose that backchannels might be used for requesting clarification. Previous research reveal that backchannels might also carry some attitudinal meanings. To illustrate, Ruede et al. (2017) claim that in some instances backchannels might indicate empathy, approval or disapproval. Additionally, Cutrone (2014) and Maynard (1997) identify some of the attitudinal functions such as showing empathy and strong emotional response.

Regarding studies on Turkish backchannels, rather than providing a general account, there appears to be an inclination to investigate specific instances of the phenomenon. To illustrate, Ruhi (2013) scrutinizes the use of *tamam* in Spoken Turkish Corpus and reveals that it is used for agreement, compliance, and comprehension check besides its function as a discourse organizer. The study also compares *tamam* and *peki* and finds that occurrence of *tamam* outnumbers tokens of *peki*. This finding is connected with changing cultures of politeness in Turkish. In another study, Bal-Gezegin (2013) analyzes the use of *hayır* and *cık* both of which mean *no*. The results unveil some differences between these two pragmatic markers. While *hayır* is mostly used as a connective, *cık* has a more emotive tone. Additionally, *cık* is used in more informal situations compared to *hayır*. Investigating *evet* and *hı-hı* in Spoken Turkish Corpus, Özcan (2015) reveals 5 common functions: (1) approval, (2) agreement, (3) continuation, (4) question-respond, and (5) divergence. This analysis confirms the attitudinal meanings of backchannels along with their roles in the organization of communication. Analyzing the pragmatic markers *hayır* and *yok* in Turkish, Altunay and Aksan (2018) point to the textual and interactional functions. More recently, based on data from Turkish National Corpus, Baydal and Kızıltan (2021) have found that the interactional marker *aynen* in Turkish is used for agreement, compliance and as an agreement solicitor. Apart from these studies on specific tokens, Aytaç-Demirçivi (2021), the baseline for the study at hand, provides an extensive analysis of both lexical and non-lexical backchannels in spoken Turkish and groups functions of backchannels into two main categories: keeping the conversational flow and showing attitudes (See Efeoğlu-Özcan (2022) for an analysis on Turkish youth talk).

The relation between gender and backchannels has also been investigated. Earlier studies, adopting a predominantly descriptive approach, mostly found that women used them more frequently than men for signaling the listener's support (see Coates, 1989, 1991; Fishman 1980; Hirschmann, 1974; Holmes, 1995; Strodtbeck and Mann, 1956). In a more recent study, Kraaz and Bernaisch

(2020) investigate backchannel use in a subset (British English, Indian English and Sri Lankan English) of the International Corpus of English (ICE). Results show that in Indian English and Sri Lankan English, backchannels are nativized pragmatically (i.e., adapted to the local sociolinguistic realities/usage) in view of factors such as age and gender and also type-token ratio (i.e., being higher in world English varieties) and conversational topic (such as elevated use during personal topics). However, to date, the gender variable has been taken in isolation and age as a variable has mostly been ignored. This is exactly where the significance of this study lies: analyzing the non-lexical backchannels in Turkish intersectionally and exploring variations in their use in naturally formed groups of gender and age.

2 Methodology

In the present study, Spoken Turkish Corpus (STC) 2.0 (institutional in-house version of the corpus) was used as the data source. The STC (https://std.metu.edu.tr/en/) is a corpus of naturally occurring face-to-face conversations and mediated communication in Turkish designed to contain rich demographic metadata about the speech environments of the conversations included (see Ruhi, Hatipoğlu, Işık-Güler, Eröz-Tuğa, 2010; Ruhi, Işık-Güler, H., Hatipoğlu, Eröz-Tuğa, and Çokal-Karadaş, 2010). Currently, STC 2.0 contains around 50 hours of spoken data (amounting to 350,000 words) recorded between 2008-2013 in various regions of Türkiye. (See Appendix A for an overview of transcription conventions used in STC).

For annotating the functions, Extensible Markup Language for Discourse Annotation (EXMARaLDA) tools, Partitur Editor, COMA and EXAKT which were also the tools used for the original corpus project, were utilized. Given the foci of the present study, a sub-corpus was formed comprised of 61 conversations from three main settings: (a) conversations among family and/or relatives (35), (b) conversations among family and friends (13) and (c) conversations among friends and/or acquaintances (13). These settings were especially chosen to analyze more naturally-occurring and unmitigated data. There were 150.494 words in total and the duration of all the recordings was 18 hours 44 minutes. To reveal the functions of non-lexical backchannels and (age/gender) group differences in their usage, this paper aims at answering the following questions:

i. What are the non-lexical backchannels and their frequencies in the STC data?
ii. What are the functions of non-lexical backchannels and their respective frequencies in the STC data?
iii. Which non-lexical backchannels are used with each function?

iv. What kind of differences are observed in the usage of non-lexical backchannels in naturally formed groups (in view of gender and age grouping variations)?

In the first stage, all the corpus transcription files were carefully read and accompanying sound files were listened to and a long list of non-lexical backchannels was formed manually to start with a more exploratory investigation, rather than sticking to specific tokens. Following that, the data was again analyzed paying attention to the surrounding context of backchannels to find out their functions. Employing a cyclic approach, after identifying a new function, the whole data was reanalyzed to find all the other instances of the same function. Then, these functions were grouped into larger categories. For assuring intercoder reliability, sample data subsets were regularly shared with experts during the analysis process.

In the last step, differences in the use of backchannels in naturally formed groups were investigated. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) recommend analyzing people's ways of negotiating meanings in and among the specific communities of practice they belong to in order not to abstract gender or social categories from social practice. Adopting this social constructionist approach, the present article does not investigate social categories in isolation to avoid overly simplistic generalizations.

Based upon the age groups classification by Hawkley et al. (2011), the first group in the data consists of people in young adulthood and their ages range from 18 to 25. The second group includes middle-aged people whose age range is between 26 and 50. The last group consists of people above 50 in elderly adulthood. The percentages of the functions of non-lexical backchannels in these groups were calculated and the results were compared to bring out any group/ing differences.

At this point, the authors also acknowledge that this study comes with certain limitations. The main limitation is the coverage of the corpus as the bulk of the data for STC was collected between the years 2008 and 2013. However, although the corpus might not be entirely up-to-date, there are not any other available recent Turkish Spoken corpora that are equally rich in metadata. The other limitation is that intonation might dramatically change the meaning of the backchannels. However, intonation was not the chief focus in this study even though accompanying files have been carefully listened to and some distinguishing intonation forms have been identified.

3 Functional Overview of Turkish Non-Lexical Backchannels

As illustrated in Table 1, for the 2231 backchannels found in the data, two main and a total of 16 sub-functions were identified. The first main function is to *keep*

the conversational flow with 9 sub-functions: (i) continuation, (ii) comprehension, (iii) responding to a question, (iv) request for repetition, (v) clarification, (vi) reassurance, (vii) indication for getting the message, (viii) listener's support, and (ix) request for a response.

The second main function is *showing attitudes* which can exhibit both *positivity* and *negativity*. Backchannels with positivity have 4 sub-functions: (i) approval, (ii) agreement, (iii) relief and (iv) agreement to an offer. Backchannels with negativity have 3 sub-functions: (i) disagreement, (ii) sarcasm and (iii) non-lexical backchannels with the meaning of *so what?*.

Table 1. Functions of backchannels and their frequency

Functions of Backchannels	Frequency of Occurrence in 61 Conversations	Within Main-function Percentage (%)
Keeping the Conversational Flow		
1. Continuation	557	35,09
2. Comprehension	427	26,9
3. Responding to a question	175	11,02
4. Request for repetition	131	8,2
5. Clarification	110	6,93
6. Reassurance	98	6,17
7. Indication for getting the message	70	4,41
8. Listener's support	13	0,81
9. Request for a response	6	0,37
Total	1587	
Attitudinal Backchannels		
B.1. Backchannels with Positivity		
1. Approval	462	75,12
2. Agreement	145	23,57
3. Relief	7	1,13
4. Agreement to an offer	1	0,16
Total	615	
B.2. Backchannels with Negativity		
1. Disagreement	16	43,24
2. Sarcasm	12	32,43

3. Backchannels with the meaning of *so what*?	9	24,32
Total	37	
Total Number of Backchannels	2231	

The non-lexical items used as backchannels in the data are presented in Table 2. A total of 24 non-lexical backchannels were identified for Turkish. Based on this table, Turkish appears to be a relatively prosperous language regarding the number of possible non-lexical backchannels in comparison to other languages studied so far.

Table 2. List of non-lexical backchannels in the data

	Non-lexical Backchannel	Number of Occurrence in 61 Conversations	Percentage within all (%)
1	hıı	378	16,94
2	hı-hı	310	13,89
3	hı	303	13,58
4	haa	229	10,26
5	hmm	193	8,65
6	ha	175	7,84
7	hm	172	7,7
8	he	141	6,32
9	hee	91	4,07
10	hm-hm	78	3,49
11	ha-ha	62	2,77
12	he-he	36	1,61
13	ı-ıh	16	0,71
14	ee	12	0,53
15	hım	11	0,49
16	hehehe	6	0,26
17	hah	5	0,22
18	hıh	3	0,13
19	hımm	3	0,13
20	a-ha	2	0,08
21	heh	2	0,08
22	hı hım	1	0,04
23	ıh	1	0,04
24	ehe	1	0,04
Total		2231	

3.1 Keeping the Conversational Flow

This section presents the first main function, which is keeping the conversational flow, with 9 different sub-functions.

3.1.1 Continuation

According to the analysis, the most common function is asking the other person to continue speaking (see Adolphs and Carter, 2013; Benus et al., 2007; Cutrone, 2014; Pipek, 2007; Ruede et al., 2017; Schegloff, 1982). The most common backchannel used with this function is *hı* followed by *hı-hı* as illustrated in Table 3. More neutral tone of the backchannel *hı* might account for its high frequency as no attitude is signaled with the continuation function.

Table 3. Backchannels used for the continuation function

Backchannel	Frequency of Occurrence in 61 Conversations	Percentage within sub-function (%)
hı	131	23,51
hı-hı	98	17,59
hıı	88	15,79
hmm	60	10,77
hm	47	8,43
hm-hm	38	6,82
he	29	5,2
haa	23	4,12
ha	13	2,33
ha-ha	9	1,61
hee	8	1,43
ee	6	1,07
he-he	4	0,71
hıh	3	0,53
Total	557	

In Excerpt (1) below, family members are trying to solve a problem related to a lawsuit for an occupational accident. SED asks her mother, KAD, where she will take the court decision and KAD says that one of her friends' father is a legal expert on occupational accidents. In order to show her mother her support and to

ask her to continue speaking, SED uses the backchannel *hı*. The backchannel in this excerpt encourages the other speaker to continue her train of thought.

(1) KAD000045: pazartesi bişey çıkacak. (microphone noise)
SED000047: ((0.4)) iyi de nerden götüreceksin sen kararı? (microphone noise)
KAD000045: bi arkadaşın babası bilirkişiymiş. ‿mahkemelerde bu iş kazalarına bakıyormuş. ((0.2)) iş kazaları için rapor hazırlıyormuş.
SED000047: ((0.2)) *hı˙*
KAD000045: ((0.6)) hani kazanın nasıl oldu ne etti ((0.5)) ona ben anlattım da mahkemeden falan bahsettim.
(Conversation: 114_090221_00007)

(1) KAD000045: something will come out on monday. (microphone noise)
SED000047: ((0.4)) it is okay but where will you take the decision? (microphone noise))
KAD000045: One of my friends' father is an expert witness. He is dealing with occupational accidents in courts. ((0.2)) he is preparing reports for occupational accidents.
SED000047: ((0.2)) *hı˙*
KAD000045: ((0.6)) Well, how the accident happened ((0.5)) I explained it to him and I talked about the court.

3.1.2 Comprehension

As highlighted by Adolphs and Carter (2013) and Benus et al. (2007), another common function is to indicate comprehension of what the other person is saying. Unlike the continuation function, backchannels for the comprehension function do not ask the other person to continue speaking. Rather, they sound like a comment about things previously mentioned. As illustrated in Table 4, the most frequent backchannel for comprehension function is *hmm*, followed by *hıı*. Since this function has almost the same meaning with *I see*, there is usually a lengthening tone.

Table 4. Backchannels used for the comprehension function

Backchannel	Frequency of Occurrence in 61 Conversations	Percentage within sub-function (%)
hmm	96	22,48
hıı	82	19,2
haa	61	14,28
hm	55	12,88

ha	26	6,08
hee	24	5,62
hı	20	4,68
hı-hı	17	3,98
hm-hm	16	3,74
he	12	2,81
ha-ha	10	2,34
hm hm hm	8	1,87
Total	427	

In the following excerpt, SAB and NAC, who are distant relatives, are discussing an illness and a medical analysis. NAC says that the results were not promising. SAB uses the backchannel *hmm* with a lengthening tone to indicate her comprehension. With the usage of the backchannel here, SAB provides a response and a comment for what NAC talks about, which, in return, increases the spirit of solidarity.

(2) SAB000541: eem ben bi sene falan… eem ((0.2)) yakın yani. ‿bi de seni yakın işte getirdiler. oğlan gitti aldı geldi.
NAC000539: hee˙
NAC000539: (şey mi)?
NAC000539: tahlil yapmışlar da ((0.2)) ee yani ((0.1)) ((hesitating)) şey çıkmamış. ((0.1)) güzel çıkmamış. ((inhales)) o tahlilden sonra da kapattılar.
SAB000541: • hmm˙

SAB000541: *hmm˙* ((voices in the background))
(Conversation: 023_100710_00192)

(2) SAB000541: eem me, about one year… eem ((0.2)) recent, I mean. ‿they also brought you recently. The boy went and brought.
NAC000539: hee˙
NAC000539: (is it...)?
NAC000539: they did a test ((.2)) ee I mean((0.1)) ((hesitating)) turned out to be not. ((0.1)) not good. ((inhales)) after that test, they cut the water.
SAB000541: • hmm˙
SAB000541: *hmm˙* ((voices in the background))

3.1.3 Responding to a question

In some instances, backchannels are observed as a component in a question-response sequence. Speaker 1 asks a question and to answer that question, Speaker 2 sometimes prefers backchannels instead of using lexical expressions. As illustrated in Table 5, the most frequently used backchannel with this function is *hı-hı*. Similarly, Özcan (2015) also claims that *hı-hı* might be used for responding to a question.

Table 5. Backchannels used for responding to a question

Backchannel	Frequency of Occurrence in 61 Conversations	Percentage within sub-function (%)
hı-hı	60	34,28
hıı	19	10,85
ı-ıh	16	9,14
ha-ha	13	7,42
hı	11	6,28
haa	9	5,14
he	8	4,57
hmm	8	4,57
ha	6	3,42
hee	6	3,42
he-he	5	2,85
hm-hm	5	2,85
a-ha	3	1,71
he he he	3	1,71
hm	3	1,71
Total	175	

In Excerpt (3), BED is the father and REC is the uncle of BIL. BIL is trying to learn about mussels by asking some questions. BIL asks her father where the mussels were found. In order to be sure, her father asks *midye mi?* and to answer this question, BIL uses the backchannel *hı-hı*. Backchannels with this function usually imply a more informal and closer relationship among the participants.

(3) BED000738: belgeselde bu yu/ ((0.2)) yabancı.
BIL000736: ((0.4)) tamam yabancı da yani…
BED000738: tra/
BED000738: t/ Travel'da seyrettim.
BIL000736: ((0.4)) nerde yani? ‿yerin altında bulunmuş bişey mi?
BED000738: ül/ ülke…
BED000738: midye mi? ((0.3)) midye denizin derinliklerinde
BIL000736: *hı-hı*
BIL000736: ((0.2)) denizden mi çıkarmışlar bunlar?
BED000738: denizden çıkarıyorlar.
(Conversation: 139_100616_00280)

(3) BED000738: in the documentary this/ ((0.2)) foreign.
BIL000736: ((0.4)) okay, it is foreign but...
BED000738: tra/
BED000738: t/ I watched it on Travel.
BIL000736: ((0.4)) so where? ‿is it something found underground?
BED000738: country…
BED000738: the mussel? ((0.3)) mussel in deep-sea
BIL000736: *hı-hı*
BIL000736: ((0.2)) did they extract it from the sea?
BED000738: they are extracting it from the sea.

3.1.4 Request for repetition

The corpus data verifies that backchannels are also utilized for requesting the other speaker to repeat their previous utterances, which is a novel finding. Speaker 1 asks a question to Speaker 2; however, Speaker 2 misses the question. Therefore, in order to ask Speaker 1 to repeat the question or the previous utterance, Speaker 2 uses a backchannel usually with a questioning tone. As illustrated in Table 6, the most frequently used backchannel with this function is *hı*.

Table 6. Backchannels used for the request for repetition function

Backchannel	Frequency of Occurrence in 61 Conversations	Percentage within sub-function (%)
hı	56	42,74
ha	27	20,61
he	25	19,08
hıı	7	5,34
hm	6	4,58

haa	5	3,81
hmm	2	1,52
hah	1	0,76
hı hı	1	0,76
hım	1	0,76
Total	131	

In Example (4), DER, UFU and AYD are friends and they are working on a task related to geometry. DER asks UFU what kind of a shape a deltoid was. However, UFU misses the question and asks his friend to repeat that question by using the backchannel *hı* with a question tone. The backchannel used in this conversation is also an indication of an informal relationship.

(4) UFU000482: yok elips değil. ‿ne o geoik geoik falan.
AYD000483: ((1.1)) geoik ne be? ((noise))
DER000481: deltoid nasıl bi şekildi ya Ufuk?
UFU000482: bunun yarım şekli.
AYD000483: hı˙
UFU000482: *hı*?
DER000481: ((0.2)) deltoid nasıl bi şekildi? ((0.3)) iki ikizkenar üçgen…
AYD000483: ((0.3)) deltoid coğrafyada var ya.
(Conversation: 158_090511_00172)

(4) UFU000482: no, not ellipsis. ‿what is that 'geoik geoik'.
AYD000483: ((1.1)) hey, what is 'geoik'? ((noise))
DER000481: hey Ufuk, what kind of a shape was deltoid?
UFU000482: half of this.
AYD000483: hı˙
UFU000482: *hı*?
DER000481: ((0.2)) what kind of a shape was deltoid? ((0.3)) two isosceles triangles...
AYD000483: ((0.3)) you know deltoid in geography.

3.1.5 Clarification

In the data, backchannels were sometimes used to clarify an issue, which has also not been identified in previous studies. Speaker 1 is confused about an issue and asks the other person to clarify that issue. When Speaker 2 explains it, Speaker 1 uses a backchannel to show that now s/he understands it. The backchannel is commonly followed by an expression like *I thought it was.....* which indicates

that before the explanation of Speaker 2, Speaker 1 had something else in his or her mind and now it became clarified. As illustrated in Table 7, *haa* is used most frequently since it has a stronger tone.

Table 7. Backchannels used for the clarification function

Backchannel	Frequency of Occurrence in 61 Conversations	Percentage within sub-function (%)
haa	47	42,72
hıı	30	27,27
hmm	11	10
ha	10	9,09
hı	5	4,54
hm	2	1,81
ha-ha	1	0,90
ha ha ha	1	0,90
he	1	0,90
hee	1	0,90
ee	1	0,90
Total	110	

In Example (5), ZEK is the husband of BEY and AKI is the husband of MUR. ZEK is a friend of AKI and MUR is a friend of BEY. The participants' mutual interest revolves around a new car that ZEK has bought. MUR is confused with the brand of the car and asks whether it is a Hyundai or not. ZEK says that it is not a Hyundai but a Honda. Then MUR indicates her clarification by using the backchannel *haa* and adds that she had thought it was another brand. The backchannel *haa*, with its stronger tone, shows the clarification of MUR's previous confusion.

(5) ZEK000051: dışardan küçük. • herkesi böyle solluyor.
BEY000052: dışı küçük.
AKI000053: • hadi canım!
AKI000053: ya ben de öyle arabaya hastayım işte.
MUR000054: Hyundai değil mi o?
ZEK000051: • değil. ‿(Hyundai'ın) Getz.
BEY000052: değil değil.
MUR000054: ((0.2)) *haa*˙ ‿ben onunla karıştırdım.
ZEK000051: ((XXX)) ((XXX)) o/

AKI000053: o Getz. ((0.3)) bu Jazz.
(Conversation: 063_090626_00011)

(5) ZEK000051: from outside, it is small. • it overtakes everybody in this way.
BEY000052: its surface is small.
AKI000053: • come on!
AKI000053: well, I'm mad about cars like this.
MUR000054: Isn't it a Hyundai?
ZEK000051: • no. ‿(Hyundai's) Getz.
BEY000052: no no.
MUR000054: ((0.2)) *haa˙* ‿I confused it with that.
ZEK000051: ((XXX)) ((XXX)) o/
AKI000053: that is a Getz. ((0.3)) this is a Jazz.

3.1.6 Reassurance

In several excerpts, backchannels indicate reassurance of a previous topic. Speaker 1 talks about an issue and Speaker 2 shows a kind of astonishment and uncertainty. To reassure what s/he said before, Speaker 1 uses some backchannels. As displayed in Table 8, the most common backchannel used for this function is *hıı* followed by *he.* Reassurance function has also not been referred to in the literature.

Table 8. Backchannels used for the reassurance function

Backchannel	Frequency of Occurrence in 61 Conversations	Percentage within sub-function (%)
hıı	22	22,44
he	15	15,3
haa	13	13,26
hı-hı	11	11,22
hee	10	10,2
hm	7	7,14
ha	6	6,12
hı	6	6,12
ha-ha	3	3,06
hm hm	3	3,06
hmm	2	2,04
Total	98	

In Excerpt (6), RID is the father of ERG and CUN is the son-in-law of RID. The discussion taking place is related to a murder and a corpse. RID talks about the colour and the place of the corpse. CUN shows his astonishment and suspicion using the words *Allah Allah!*. In order to reassure the speaker about what he had said before, RID uses the backchannel *hı-hı*. This example shows that backchannels might also be used for confirmation of a previous issue.

(6 CUN000626: bulmuşlar.
RID000628: amir aradı. hemen gitti. mosmor olmuş Rıdvan abi diyor.
ERG000211: bu şeyin arkasında hatta ne o?
RID000628: ((0.4)) arka sokağında.
ERG000211: ((XXX)) arkasında.
CUN000626: Allah Allah!
RID000628: *hı-hı˙*
ERG000211: ((0.)) mosmor ceset bulmuşlar.
(Conversation: 055_090619_00222)

(6) CUN000626: they found.
RID000628: the chief called. he went immediately. he says he was deep blue, Rıdvan brother.
ERG000211: it is behind that stuff in fact, what is that?
RID000628: ((0.4)) on its back street.
ERG000211: ((XXX)) on its back.
CUN000626: good heavens!
RID000628: *hı-hı˙*
ERG000211: ((0.)) they found a black-and-blue corpse.

3.1.7 Indication for getting the message

In STC data, backchannels sometimes show that the listener gets what the other person says, similar to the comprehension function. However, with this specific indicating function, the listener shows a *stronger* tone of understanding. Speaker 1 asks a question and Speaker 2 answers that question. In order to show that s/he got the answer, Speaker 1 uses backchannels. On the other hand, there is not any question posed in the comprehension function. The backchannel *haa* which has a stronger tone is used most frequently as presented in Table 9. This function is also novel to the present study.

Table 9. Backchannels used for getting the message function

Backchannel	Frequency of Occurrence in 61 Conversations	Percentage within sub-function (%)
haa	29	41,42
hıı	18	25,71
ha-ha	8	11,42
ha	7	10
hee	2	2,85
hı	2	2,85
hm	2	2,85
hmm	2	2,85
Total	70	

In Extract (7), CEN is the father of SEN and they are cooking together. SEN asks her father whether it is appropriate to boil the water at that moment and her father says it will be better if she puts it on the stove a bit later. Then, to show that she really grasps what her father said, SEN uses the backchannel *hmm* with a lengthening tone right after *hm.* With the second backchannel, SEN demonstrates a stronger tone of understanding of the directive for which she has already inquired about.

(7) SEN000678: ((0.5)) erken mi? ((0.2)) iyi mi şimdi koymam?
CEN000680: ((poffs))˙ ee biraz sonra koyarsan ((0.8)) daha iyi olur. ((0.2)) çünkü makarna soğuduğu zaman lezzetli olmaz. ((0.4)) bu ((1.2)) yarım saat kırk beş dakka • sürebilir.
SEN000678: ((0.4)) hm˙
SEN000678: ((0.2)) *hmm˙* • o yüzden makarna için zamanımız var.
CEN000680: (hıı)˙ ‿makarna için veya pilav için zamanımız var.
(Conversation: 138_100614_00242)

(7) SEN000678: ((0.5)) is it early? ((0.2)) is it appropriate to put it now?
CEN000680: ((poffs))˙ ee if you put it a bit later ((0.8)) it will be better. ((0.2)) because when the pasta gets cold, it will not be delicious. ((0.4)) this ((1.2)) might take half an hour or fourty five minutes.
SEN000678: ((0.4)) hm˙
SEN000678: ((0.2)) *hmm˙* • so we have time for the pasta.
CEN000680: (hıı)˙ ‿we have time for the pasta or rice.

3.1.8 Listener's support

Another function identified is showing listener's support for the current speaker. Speaker 1 addresses Speaker 2, and Speaker 2 uses a backchannel to show his or her support for Speaker 1. Backchannels with this function might also mean *Okay, I am listening to you*. As illustrated in Table 10, among all backchannels identified, *hı* is used most frequently for showing listener's support.

Table 10. Backchannels used for the listener's support function

Backchannel	Frequency of Occurrence in 61 Conversations	Percentage within sub-function (%)
hı	4	30,76
haa	2	15,38
heh	2	15,38
hm	2	15,38
ha	1	7,69
he	1	7,69
hıı	1	7,69
Total	13	

In Excerpt (8) below, MEH and MUS are distant relatives and they are trying to form their family tree. After some discussion about the family tree, MEH tries to develop some explanations and addressing MUS, he says *look, now*. To show that he is listening to MEH, MUS uses the backchannel *he.* In this way, MUS both responds to MEH's addressing and provides him with the necessary support to continue.

(8) MUS000117: ya bizim de benim de benim oğlan var işte Aydınlı ((_._)) Ali var da • Ali İhsan koyduyduk biz adını kay /gitmesin Aydın'a diye.
MEH000116: ((0.6)) şimdi
MUS000117: ((0.2)) ((laughs))
MEH000116: ee
MUS000117: kaçıyormuş o da
MEH000116: burdan şu sonuca vardık • bak şimdi
MUS000117: *he*
MEH000116: ((0.8)) ee ne dedik? ((0.9)) Ayanoğlu Süleyman ((0.9)) kimle evli? ‿Döndü'yle. dedenle

(Conversation: 044_090328_00038)

(8) MUS000117: we have my son from Aydın ((_._))He is Ali • We named him Ali İhsan so he would not go to Aydın.
MEH000116: ((0.6)) now
MUS000117: ((0.2)) ((laughs))
MEH000116: ee
MUS000117: he is also escaping
MEH000116: from this we came to the conclusion that • look now
MUS000117: *he*
MEH000116: ((0.8)) ee what did we say? ((0.9)) Ayanoğlu Süleyman ((0.9)) who is he married to? ‿to Döndü. With your grandfather

3.1.9 Request for a response

Request for a response is another affordance of backchannels. In this function, Speaker 1 asks a question and there is usually a certain amount of silence. When there is no answer, to request a response, Speaker 1 uses a backchannel. As illustrated in Table 11, the most frequently used backchannels are *hı* and *hıı*.

Table 11. Backchannels used for the request for a response function

Backchannel	Frequency of Occurrence in 61 Conversations	Percentage within sub-function (%)
hı	2	33,33
hıı	2	33,33
ha	1	16,66
hm	1	16,66
Total	6	

In Example (9), a phone conversation is in effect in which MUS is the father of EMR and MUR. EMR is the elder sister of MUR and EMR000546 is the mother of EMR000636. MUR asks EMR000636 what color his new t-shirt is. After this question, there is silence, knock on wood and silence again. To request a response, she uses the backchannel *hm* with a questioning tone. After the backchannel, MUS says that it is red to provide a response. This excerpt is another evidence for the significance of backchannels in achieving supportive elicitation of a response.

(9) MUS000545: rengi nasıl de hele!
MUR000547: (hm)˙ ‿((XXX))
MUS000545: kırmızı diyor.

MUR000547: ((1.1)) Emre ((0.1)) e… ((inhales)) Emre ne renk tişört aldınız sana?
EMR000546: ((XXX)) ((silence, knock on wood, silence))
MUR000547: *hm?*
MUS000545: kırmızı diyor. ((1.4)) sarı mı kırmızı mı de de bak nasıl diyor.
(Conversation: 179_090117_00195)

(9) MUS000545: tell me how its color is!
MUR000547: (hm)˙ ‿((XXX))
MUS000545: he says it is red.
MUR000547: ((1.1)) Emre ((0.1)) e… ((inhales)) Emre what color tshirt did you buy for you?
EMR000546: ((XXX)) ((silence, knock on wood, silence))
MUR000547: *hm?*
MUS000545: he says it is red. ((1.4)) it is yellow or red, say it, look how he says it.

3.2 Attitudinal Backchannels

Showing positive or negative attitudes is the second main function identified. This section presents the attitudinal backchannels providing specific examples from the data.

3.2.1 Backchannels with positivity

Attitudinal backchannels with positivity consist of face-saving acts including approval, agreement and relief.

3.2.1.1 Approval

The analysis demonstrates that a very common function of the backchannels is to show approval as identified by Özcan (2015) and Ruede et al. (2017). Backchannels with this function indicate that Speaker 1 also knows what Speaker 2 is saying. Backchannels for the agreement function show a subjective viewpoint while with the approval function, they show a common ground for what is mentioned. Since this function has an attitudinal aspect, the speakers usually use stronger backchannels such as *ha ha ha* and *hı-hı* which include the repetition, the duplication of the initial backchannel sound. As illustrated in Table 12, *hı-hı* is the most frequent backchannel in this category.

Table 12. Backchannels used for the approval function

Backchannel	Frequency of Occurrence in 61 Conversations	Percentage within sub-function (%)
hı-hı	98	21,21
hıı	63	13,63
he	43	9,3
hı	36	7,79
ha	34	7,35
he-he	34	7,35
hmm	30	6,49
hee	29	6,27
ha-ha	25	5,41
hm-hm	24	5,19
hm	18	3,89
ha ha ha	5	1,08
hımm	5	1,08
he he he	4	0,86
hı-hım	4	0,86
haa	4	0,86
ee	4	0,86
ehe	4	0,86
Total	462	

In the following excerpt, NUR is the mother of BEG. BEG has started to read a book and she announces that she started to in order to indicate that she would like to chat and share information about it. In order to momentarily approve her daughter's wish, NUR uses the backchannel *hı-hı*. Owing to the backchannel, BEG gets the support, the go ahead to continue their joint activity, i.e., conversing about the book.

(10) BEG000434: ((XXX)) ((0.8)) başladım.
NUR000373: ((0.3)) *hı-hı˙*
BEG000434: ((inhales)) ((exhales)) Robin Hood hakkın ((0.3)) da ((inhales)) kitap okudum. • onla ((0.5)) ilgili konuşma yapmak istiyorum. yani

onu anlatmak istiyorum. ((0.2)) ((inhales)) ((exhales)) ((inhales)) ((0.4)) olay ((0.1)) ho/ orman… ((0.1)) vah… Sherwood Ormanı'nda geçiyordu.
(Conversation: 082_090820_00262)

(10) BEG000434: ((XXX)) ((0.8)) I started.
NUR000373: ((0.3)) *hı-hı˙*
BEG000434: ((inhales)) ((exhales)) I read a book ((0.3)) about Robin Hood. • I want to make a speech about it, I mean I want to share it ((0.2)) ((inhales)) ((exhales)) ((inhales)) ((0.4)) the event ((0.1)) forest… ((0.1)) was taking place in Sherwood Forest.

3.2.1.2 Agreement

The results of the analysis show that backchannels are also used to indicate agreement (see Benus et al., 2007; Cutrone, 2014; Ozcan, 2015; Pipek, 2007). Speaker 1 proposes an idea and Speaker 2 uses a backchannel to show that s/he agrees with the proposition. As shown in Table 13, *hı-hı* is the most frequently used backchannel for agreement followed by *hıı*.

Table 13. Backchannels used for the agreement function

Backchannel	Frequency of Occurrence in 61 Conversations	Percentage within sub-function (%)
hı-hı	28	19,31
hıı	26	17,93
ha	19	13,1
hı	15	10,34
haa	12	8,27
ha-ha	10	6,89
hmm	8	5,51
hm	7	4,82
he	6	4,13
hm-hm	6	4,13
hee	5	3,44
he-he	2	1,37
hah	1	0,68
Total	145	

In Example (11), NAC is EMI's husband's sister. They are talking about some characteristics of a woman called Dilek and NAC's aunt. NAC says that her aunt is also walking in the same way as Dilek does. EMI shows her agreement using the backchannel *hı-hı* displaying a rapport among the conversational partners.

(11) NAC000539: karıncayı ezecek gibi yürürdü ve yürürdü.
EMI000540: zaten çok ağır. ((0.4)) Dilek ona benzemiş heralde le?
NAC000539: hı˙
NAC000539: hı-hı˙ aynı.
EMI000540: Dilek de aynı.
NAC000539: ((0.1)) aynı. aynı öyle yürüyor.
EMI000540: ((0.2)) *hı-hı˙*

NAC000539: ((0.2)) teyzem bi adım atana kadar sen de ((0.1)) şeye varır gelirdin.

(Conversation: 023_100707_00193)

(11 NAC000539: he was walking and walking as if he was about to crush an ant.
EMI000540: he is already so slow. ((0.4)) Dilek takes after him probably?
NAC000539: hı˙
NAC000539: hı-hı˙ the same.
EMI000540: Dilek is also the same.
NAC000539: ((0.1)) the same. She is also walking in that way.
EMI000540: ((0.2)) *hı-hı˙*
NAC000539: ((0.2)) until my aunt takes a step ((0.1)) you would arrive there and come back.

3.2.1.3 Relief

In some instances, backchannels are used to show relief which has not been named in previous research on backchannels. As illustrated in Table 14, *ha*, which has a stronger tone, is the most frequently used backchannel for the relief function.

Table 14. Backchannels used for the relief function

Backchannel	Frequency of Occurrence in 61 Conversations	Percentage within sub-function (%)
ha	4	57,14
haa	2	28,57
hıh	1	14,28
Total	7	

Example (13) takes place during a marriage ceremony, as the witnesses are signing the legal documents. HAS is the registrar appointed by the municipality, M. 000145 is a witness, MEH000142 is the fiancée/groom of ELI000146, the bride. CAN000153 is a friend of the bride and groom. CAN insists that the bride should step on the groom's foot. In Turkish culture, if the bride manages to step on her groom's foot, it is traditionally believed that she will have the upper hand during the marriage. When the bride says that she did it, CAN conveys his feelings and relief by using the backchannel *hıh.*

(12) HAS000143: şahitler şöyle alalım sizin imzalarınızı da.
M. 000145: ((1.0)) nereye atıyoruz Hocam?
HAS000143: ((0.6)) evet orası size ait.
M. 000145: şuraya mı?
ELI000146: tam Mehmet 'in ayağına bastım.
HAS000143: evet. altına da atabilirsiniz.
CAN000153: ((XXX)) basmalısın.
ELI000146: basıyorum çekmelisin bunu. ((3.4)) ((laughs)) ((1.2)) ((short laugh))˙
CAN000153: *hıh*˙ ((silence))
ERK000144: ayağına bas ayağına. ayağına bas diyorum.
MEH000142: oldu.
(Conversation: 121_100309_00053)

(12) HAS000143: witnesses, let's get your signatures here.
M. 000145: ((1.0)) where are we putting our signatures Mr?
HAS000143: ((0.6)) yes, that part belongs to you.
M. 000145: to this part?
ELI000146: I just stepped on Mehmet's foot.
HAS000143: yes. you can also sign below.
CAN000153: ((XXX)) you should step on it.
ELI000146: I'm stepping on it, you should take a photo of this. ((3.4)) ((laughs)) ((1.2)) ((short laugh))
CAN000153: *hıh*˙ ((silence))
ERK000144: step on his foot. I say step on his foot.
MEH000142: done.

3.2.1.4 Agreement to an offer

Backchannels might also indicate an agreement to an offer. Speaker 1 offers to do something and Speaker 2 agrees with that offer using a backchannel. Agreement to an offer function has not been specifically named in previous research. As illustrated in Table 15, this function is very rare and the corpus has only one instance in which the backchannel *hm* was used for it.

Table 15. Backchannels used for the agreement to an offer function

Backchannel	Frequency of Occurrence in 61 Conversations	Percentage within sub-function (%)
hm	1	100
Total	1	

In Example (13), ISA is the elder brother of CAG and they are discussing a book CAG has read recently. CAG offers to show something to ISA. In order to show his agreement to this offer, ISA uses the backchannel *hm*. The backchannel *hm* positively manages rapport between the speakers by providing the requested permission by CAG.

(13) ISA000058: ((2.1)) hmm˙ ((0.2)) bak burada işte ((2.1)) kitap/ önerdiği kitaplar bunlar mı diyor mesela? ((silence))
CAG000125: yok. ‿hayır. ‿bu değil. ((0.2)) altında ee bak göstereyim mi?
ISA000058: ((XXX))
ISA000058: *hm˙* ((sound of papers))
CAG000125: şurada altında bir yerde açıklaması yazıyordu o kitabın çünkü Fransızcayla söylüyordu. ((0.8)) ee hayır bunlar değil.
(Conversation: 061_090623_00050)

(13) ISA000058: ((2.1)) hmm˙ ((0.2)) look, it is here ((2.1)) are the book/the books he recommends like these? ((silence))
CAG000125: no. ‿no. ‿that is not. ((0.2)) below it ee shall I show it?
ISA000058: ((XXX))
ISA000058: *hm˙* ((sound of papers))
CAG000125: there was the explanation of that book somewhere here because it was in French. ((0.8)) ee no, not these.

3.2.2 Backchannels with negativity

Attitudinal backchannels with negativity can be classified as face threatening acts for the other speaker and include disagreement, sarcasm and implying the meaning of '*so what*?'.

3.2.2.1 Disagreement

Disagreement is another function of backchannels (see Özcan, 2015; Pipek, 2007; Ruede et al., 2017). When Speaker 1 does not agree with Speaker 2, s/he may sometimes use a backchannel to show disagreement. As can be seen in

Table 16, the only backchannel used for the disagreement function identified in the corpus is *ı-ıh*.

Table 16. Backchannels used for the disagreement function

Backchannel	Frequency of Occurrence in 61 Conversations	Percentage within sub-function (%)
ı-ıh	16	100
Total	16	

In Excerpt (14), NAS and VAC are distant relatives. The ongoing conversation is related to one of VAS's memories and how she settled down at where she is living now. NAC is mentioning one of her assumptions about VAS's life. In order to indicate her disagreement with this assumption, VAS uses the backchannel *ı-ıh* denoting a divergence.

(14) VAS000542: ((1.9)) onlara ne kadar oluyormuş? ‿babam üç yaşındaymış o zaman. ((1.0)) onlara ne kadar oluyormuş az/ ((0.2)) akraba olarak? ((0.5)) aman ağam dedi ona vasiyet etmiş. ((0.6)) benim bir evladım dedi verip de oralara ne olur ne olmaz bu dünya bu dedi. ((0.5)) ararlar sorarlar bulurlar götürmek isterler dedim. ‿ne olur ((0.4)) yollamayın dedi. ((0.4)) o memleket öyle bir dar memleket ki dedi. ‿o/ öyle bir dar geçiniyorlar ki dedi. ((0.6)) benim evladımı yollayıp da oralarda perişan etmeyin dedi. ((0.3)) rahmetli. ((noise)) ((noise))
NAC000539: ((0.2)) ben sizi ((0.1)) topraklıktan ((0.4)) geldiniz yerleştiniz de ordan buluştunuz zannediyorum.
VAS000542: ((0.3)) *ı-ıh˙*
NAC000539: ((0.4)) köyden getirdi ta ya ((0.1)) şeyden/ Aksaray'dan.
(Conversation: 023_100707_00193)

(14) VAS000542: ((1.9)) how close were they? ‿my father was 3 years old then. ((1.0)) ((0.2)) as a relative? ((0.5)) he spoke his last will to him. ((0.6)) I have a descendent, just to be on the safe side in this world, if you give him to them..((0.5)) I said they seek, ask, find and want to take him away. ‿please ((0.4)) he said do not send him. ((0.4)) he said that hometown is such a constricted one. ‿they have such low incomes. ((0.6)) do not drag my child down by sending him there. ((0.3)) the deceased. ((noise)) ((noise))
NAC000539: ((0.2)) I thought you came from the field, settled and met them.
VAS000542: ((0.3)) *ı-ıh˙*
NAC000539: ((0.4)) he brought from the village ((0.1)) from the place/ Aksaray.

3.2.2.3 Sarcasm

Although observed relatively less frequently, sarcasm is another function of non-lexical backchannels in Turkish. Backchannels with this function indicate a kind of irony with the meaning *that's what you think but the real situation is not so*. As illustrated in Table 17, *ha-ha* is used most commonly in this sarcasm meaning with a tone further underscoring how ridiculous something sounds. Though it may be intuitive for most L1 speakers, the sarcasm function has been documented for corpus data for the first time in the current study.

Table 17. Backchannels used for the sarcasm function

Backchannel	Frequency of Occurrence in 61 Conversations	Percentage within sub-function (%)
ha-ha	4	33,33
ee	2	16,66
hıı	2	16,66
haa	1	8,33
he	1	8,33
hıh	1	8,33
hmm	1	8,33
Total	12	

In Example (15), MUR and SEB are friends and the topic is buying a house. SEB says that the owners of the house will offer the house to SEB's family. In order to show that she does not quite agree with what SEB says, MUR uses the backchannel *hıı* scoffingly, functioning as a face threatening act in the exchange.

(15) MUR000054: tamam işte.
SEB000632: ((0.2)) hı˙
MUR000054: ((0.1)) alacağız alacağız deyin oyalayın.
SEB000632: hı˙ ((0.3)) bizden tarafa di… ‿ yani hep bize (diye) teklif edecekler zaten de.
MUR000054: ((0.3)) *hıı˙*
SEB000632: ((0.2)) ee ((0.1)) ama siz alın. ((0.8)) bak.
MUR000054: ((0.8)) ya s…
SEB000632: benden iyi komşu bulabilir misin abla?
(Conversation Number: 063_090702_00224)

(15) MUR000054: that's okay.
SEB000632: ((0.2)) hı˙
MUR000054: ((0.1)) say you will buy it you will buy it and stall them.
SEB000632: hı˙ ((0.3)) it was always a done deal… ‿ they have always wanted to offer it to us.
MUR000054: ((0.3)) *hıı˙*
SEB000632: ((0.2)) ee ((0.1)) so you should buy it. ((0.8)) look.
MUR000054: ((0.8)) ya s…
SEB000632: can you find a better neighbor than me, sister?

3.2.2.2 Backchannels with the meaning of 'so what?'

In some instances, backchannels are used to ask the other person what the value of the things they are talking about really is and what seems to be their relation to the main topic. Speaker 2 understands what Speaker 1 is saying; however, s/he actually wants to know what the relevance of it is, why Speaker 1 is mentioning that specific issue in the first place. As illustrated in Table 18, the most frequently used backchannel used for this function is *ee*. This function also exhibits originality for Turkish with regard to previous research.

Table 18. Backchannels used for the meaning of 'so what?'

Backchannel	Frequency of Occurrence in 61 Conversations	Percentage within sub-function (%)
ee	6	66,66
hıı	2	22,22
hmm	1	11,11
Total	9	

In Example (16), SEL is the elder brother of SED and they are discussing a movie called 'Recep İvedik'. SEL says that a specific company is shooting many advertisements with Recep İvedik. SED does not understand the relevance of what SEL says; therefore, she asks him to explain it using the backchannel *hıı* twice. Though it does not sound supportive, still, the participants are able to keep the conversation going.

(16) SEL000048: ya bak şimdi Turkcell • biliyorsun şeyle ((0.5)) reklam çeviriyor Recep İvedik'le. ((0.7)) bir değil beş değil. ((0.7)) kaç tane reklam çekti Recep İvedik'le. ((clatter of tableware)) ((clatter of tableware))
SED000047: ‿*hıı˙*
SEL000048: ((0.4)) doğru mu?
SED000047: ((0.1)) *hıı˙*

SEL000048: doğru. ‿adamlar ((0.4)) işin araştırmasını yapmış da çekmiş. ((0.8)) yani öyle haybeye değil. ((0.1)) koskoca Turkcell bu.
(Conversation: 114_090221_00007)

(16) SEL000048: hey look now, you know Turkcell is shooting an ad with Recep İvedik. ((0.7)) that is not a one-off thing. ((0.7)) they shot so many advertisements with Recep İvedik. ((clatter of tableware)): ((clatter of tableware))
SED000047: ‿*hıı˙*
SEL000048: ((0.4)) Is it not true?
SED000047: ((0.1)) *hıı˙*
SEL000048: Its true. ‿they did the research and then shot the advertisement. ((0.8)) that means it is not without reason. ((0.1)) this is big shot Turkcell.

4 Use of Non-lexical Backchannels in Naturally Formed Groups

The use of the specific non-lexical backchannels detailed in the previous sections were found to be different according to the conversational group make-up in view of gender. The conversations extracted from the corpus and examined in this study were formed (naturally) of three main groups which were (1) all female, (2) all male and (3) mixed gender conversations. It needs to be noted that the gender variable has not been assigned by the researchers but is based on self-reports gathered from the informants at the time of data and demographic data collection for the corpus. Likewise, all conversations were recorded in naturally formed groups by the interlocuters.

The third type of grouping, mixed conversations, had three sub-groups which are (a) majority female groups, (b) majority male groups and (c) conversations with equal numbers of male and female speakers. After identifying the groups' gender composition for each conversation, differences in the usage of backchannels were examined within and across these groups.

Table 19 displays the distribution of backchannels in the three main gender groups. Non-lexical backchannels are most frequently used in all female groups followed by mixed groups. The fewest number of backchannels are observed in all male groups. These results show that in natural conversational settings, females have an inclination to use non-lexical backchannels almost twice as frequently as males do.

Table 19. Distribution of backchannels in three main gender groups

Gender Group	Total Number of Words	Total Number of BCs	Percentage of BCs in all tokens (%)
All female (12 conversations)	21181	428	2,02
All male (7 conversations)	16753	191	1,14
Mixed (42 conversations)	112560	1612	1,43
Total	150494	2231	1,48

4.1 All Female Groups

All female groups were composed of four sub-groups which are (i) young, (ii) middle aged-elderly, (iii) young-middle aged, and (iv) young-middle aged-elderly speakers. As illustrated in Table 20, in all female conversations, the mixture of young-middle aged-elderly groups have the most non-lexical backchannels. In all female groups, backchannels were most commonly used for approval.

Table 20. Distribution of backchannels in all female groups

Age Groups	Most Common Functions of BCs	Number of the Conversations the Function is Observed Most Frequently	Percentage of BCs in all tokens (%)
Young-middle aged-elderly (3 conversations)	Approval Continuation Request for repetition	1 1 1	7,88
Middle aged-elderly (2 conversations)	Continuation	2	5,31
Young-middle aged (4 conversations)	Approval Comprehension Responding to a question	2 1 1	3,87
Young (3 conversations)	Approval Comprehension	2 1	3,48

4.2 All Male Groups

All male groups consisted of two sub-groups which are (i) young and (ii) young-elderly groups. As illustrated in Table 21, in all male groups, conversations with young participants have more instances of non-lexical backchannels. In all male groups, continuation was the most frequently observed function.

Table 21. Distribution of backchannels in all male groups

Age Groups	Most Common Functions of BCs	Number of the Conversations the Function is Observed Most Frequently	Percentage of BCs in all tokens (%)
Young (5 conversations)	Approval Continuation Request for repetition	2 2 1	8,1
Young-Elderly (2 conversations)	Continuation	2	1,71

4.3 Mixed Groups

It was observed that mixed groups were comprised of three sub-groups which are (i) majority female, (ii) majority male groups and (iii) conversations with equal numbers of male and female speakers.

4.3.1 Majority female groups

Majority female groups are formed of four sub-groups which are (i) young, (ii) young-elderly, (iii) young-middle aged, and (iv) young-middle aged-elderly. As displayed in Table 22, young and young-middle aged-elderly groups display more examples of non-lexical backchannels. In majority female groups, approval was the most frequently used function followed by comprehension and continuation.

Table 22. Distribution of backchannels in majority female groups

Age Groups	Most Common Functions of BCs	Number of the Conversations the Function is Observed Most Frequently	Percentage of BCs in all tokens (%)
Young-middle aged-elderly (3 conversations)	Comprehension Responding to a question Clarification	1 1 1	7,27
Young (4 conversations)	Approval Comprehension Responding to a question	2 1 1	7,06
Young-elderly (4 conversations)	Approval Comprehension Continuation	2 1 1	6,62

Young-middle aged (6 conversations)	Approval Continuation Request for repetition Reassurance Indication for getting the message Clarification	1 1 1 1 1 1	4,86
Middle aged (1 conversation)	Approval	1	1,57

4.3.2 Majority male groups

Examination of the data showed that mixed conversations with more male speakers consisted of four sub-groups which are (i) young, (ii) young-middle aged, (iii) young-elderly and (iv) young-middle aged-elderly. As shown in Table 23, continuation was the most common function in majority male groups.

Table 23. Distribution of backchannels in majority male groups

Age Groups	Most Common Functions of BCs	Number of the Conversations the Function is Observed Most Frequently	Percentage of BCs in all tokens (%)
Young-middle aged (7 conversations)	Continuation Comprehension Request for repetition Relief Responding to a question	3 1 1 1 1	5,66
Young-elderly (2 conversations)	Approval Continuation	1 1	3,35
Young-middle aged-elderly (1 conversation)	Approval	1	1,84
Young (1 conversation)	Continuation	1	0,81

4.4 Groups with Equal Numbers of Male and Female Speakers

Conversations with equal numbers of female and male speakers are formed of five sub-groups which are (i) young, (ii) middle aged, (iii) young-middle aged, (iv) middle aged-elderly and (v) young-middle aged-elderly. Continuation and approval were the most frequent functions in these groups as illustrated in Table 24.

Table 24. Distribution of backchannels in groups with equal numbers of female and male speakers

Age Groups	Most Common Functions of BCs	Number of the Conversations the Function is Observed Most Frequently	Percentage of BCs in all tokens (%)
Young (5 conversations)	Continuation Agreement Approval Indication for getting the message	2 1 1 1	9,77
Young-middle aged (4 conversations)	Continuation Approval Clarification Request for repetition	1 1 1 1	4,54
Middle aged-elderly (1 conversation)	Indication for getting the message	1	3,7
Middle aged (2 conversations)	Comprehension	2	2,7
Young-middle aged-elderly (1 conversation)	Continuation	1	1,83

5 Conclusion

The findings of this study unveil some overt tendencies for different age and gender groupings considering the usage of backchannels. Groups with female speakers and young speakers tend to use backchannels more for approving the other speaker, whereas groups with male speakers, middle-aged and elderly speakers tend to use backchannels for continuation of the conversation, a more neutral objective. However, paying attention to the exceptions in the data, generalizing the findings to all age and gender groups seems not to be possible.

The findings bring to light the significance of the topic being talked about and group dynamics. To illustrate, in Extract (17), an all-male conversation consisting of only young speakers, there aren't any backchannels. Speaker 1 rhapsodizes about one of his experiences of summoning a genie. The other speakers mostly stay silent with little contribution, which might be an indication of not being interested in the topic. Standing out as a divergent case and being in discord with the tendencies prevalent in the STC regarding the use of backchannels within young speaker groups, this excerpt verifies how unwillingly and uncooperatively speakers might behave when they lack interest in the topic, making an entire exchange (the long conversation Extract 17 below has been taken from) devoid of any backchannels.

(17) XMA000379: ((0.6)) on yaşında falanım biliyor musun? ((0.7)) annem dedi ki arkadaşları falan var ablamın. bizim eve toplandılar. (çağırdılar). annem dedi yapmayın. çağırmayın falan. ((0.5)) bunlar tepsi fincan falan koydular hacı. ((0.6)) çağırdılar. ben annemin yanında… ((0.3)) yemin ediyorum var ya öyle bir korktum ki ben. ((0.6)) hacı! ((0.3)) ne oldu biliyor musun? fincanı falan çevirdiler. ((0.6)) bizim mutfakta varya bir ses geliyor . mutfakta sanki herşeyi yıkıyor. ((0.4)) tüm çanakları birbirine vuruyorlar böyle. ((0.4)) ben korkudan annemin arkasına sığındım böyle. tam anne diyorum. ‿korkuyorum diyorum. • annem bakıyor falan. ablamgil de korktu artık. ((0.2)) ilk başta şaka gibi geliyordu onlara. ((0.4)) ama mutfaktan gelen sesi duysan hacı inanamazsın. sanki varya böyle dolapları hani açarsın teker teker aşağı atarsın ya. ((0.5)) bildiğin o sesler. çanakları birbirine vuruyor.
XMA000380: hayır. zorunuz neydi? niye çağırdınız?
(Conversation Number: 039_090319_00143)

(17) XMA000379: ((0.6)) do you know I was about ten years old? ((0.7)) my mother said.. my sister has friends and they gathered in our house (they called) my mother said them not to do it. don't summon a genie. ((0.5)) they put tray and cups. ((0.6)) they summoned. Me with my mother… ((0.3)) I swear I was so afraid. ((0.6)) man! ((0.3)) do you know what happened? They twirled the cup and so. ((0.6)) you know what, there was such a noise coming from the kitchen. it was like shattering everything in the kitchen. ((0.4)) it was banging all the pots together. ((0.4)) I fell back upon my mother because of fear. I say mother. ‿I'm afraid. • my mother is looking and such. My sisters were also afraid. ((0.2)) at the beginning it was like a joke for them. ((0.4)) but if you hear the noise coming from the kitchen, you can't believe, man. It was like, you know, you open the cupboards one by one and throw them. ((0.5)) those same sounds. Banging all the pots together.
XMA000380: nope. What was the matter with you? Why did you summon them?

In line with Lee (2020), in the data of this study, despite some inclinations for different age and gender groupings, when people have a common ground and more curiosity about the conversational topic, they create a more cooperative atmosphere and display an intentional effort to be involved in the meaning-making process, for which backchannels with their various functions are also used as means.

Lastly, this study aimed to explicate the discursive functions of non-lexical backchannels in Turkish; however, as underlined by Heinz (2003), backchannelling is a universal phenomenon though specific backchannelling behaviors are culture and language dependent. As such, the findings in the present study might provide insight for the functions of backchannels and different tendencies in their

usage in other languages. As digital communication has recently created an important number of digital non-lexical backchannels, this study aims to be a baseline for further studies on these digital and multimodal non-lexical backchannels in Turkish. Analyzing prosody, pitch and intonation contours did not fall within the scope of this study; however, for future studies, investigating backchannels in more current naturally occurring data with a specific focus on intonation of backchannels would undoubtedly give additional insights into these 'tiny but mighty' elements in conversations.

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Submission statement and verification: This study has not been previously published elsewhere. It is not under review in another journal. Publication of the study has been approved, either implicitly or explicitly, by all authors and the responsible authorities at the university/research center where the study was conducted. If the study is accepted for publication, it will not be published in the same form in another printed or electronic medium in Turkish or any other language without the written permission of the Journal of Linguistic Research.
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Appendix A. Transcription Conventions used in STC

Symbol	*Function (adapted from STC Transcription Guidelines, Ruhi, et al., 2010)*
•	Pauses shorter than 0.1 second are presented with a bullet point.
((_._))	Double parentheses are used to mark pauses equal or longer than 0.1 second.
/	Forward slash is used for repairs that occur in utterances where a speaker corrects, changes a word, or restarts an utterance.
.	Full stop is used to mark declarative utterances and utterances with falling intonation.
?	Question mark is used for all types of questions, including utterances that are syntactically declarative but functionally a question.
!	The exclamation mark is used to mark utterances that have an exclamatory function, utterances that have a rising intonation, and greetings and vocatives uttered loudly.
...	The cut-off sign is used for utterances that are not completed by the speaker or where the speaker's turn is interrupted.
‿	The ligature sign is used for latching which shows that the speaker did not leave an audible pause between two utterances.
-	The hyphen is used for multi-syllable non-lexicalised interjections and other types of semi-lexicalized units such as agreement markers.
˙	The superscript dot is used for non-lexicalised backchannels and paralinguistic features that form a distinct intonation contour.
((…))	Paralinguistic and prosodic features are marked between double parentheses. Audible actions and background noises are presented between double parentheses.
(text)	Single parentheses are used to mark unclear parts in an utterance.
((XXX))	Three capital X letters within double parentheses are used to indicate unintelligible or inaudible parts in an utterance
<text >	Boundaries of overlaps are marked using < >